

Christian Liberty

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1 Cor. 8:1-13

I. **1Cor. 8:1** Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

- The main thought in Paul's teaching here is about things offered to idols. But notice that he begins the lesson with the rule that "knowledge makes people arrogant, proud, even boastful, while love builds others up."
- Everybody saved has a certain spiritual knowledge about the taboo of participating in some facet of idolatry. Now, since the kind of wholesale idolatry that Paul is addressing is really not prevalent in our culture, we might think that there isn't much to get from a lesson about it. But, Paul's lesson actually contains some important spiritual principles that are something Christians in every culture need to know. So, let's look at the principles set forth here.
- In order for us to get something out of a lecture about things offered to idols, we need to associate that with something parallel in today's world where meat offerings are not made to idols in religious ceremonies as it was in Corinth. So, what might be some of those parallel things; things that are viewed as spiritually wrong among some Christian people today? So let's think about something which some folks might considered defiled because it is usually associated with something worldly, something heretical or something people just consider taboo.
 - ▶ Example: Some Christian folks won't eat pork because God forbade the Jews to eat it
 - ▶ Example: Some Christian folks won't use power equipment such as automobiles because they believe it is evil
 - ▶ Example: Some Christian folks are vegetarians because they think meat defiles them
 - ▶ In each of these cases, those who believe that usually think that they have a more spiritual understanding of things than that part of the Christian world that doesn't practice this.
 - ▶ In each of these cases, there are many of those who tend to become arrogant, big-headed and self-righteous because of the way they look at others who do not practice what they practice.
- This is the snare from one side of this subject
- But there is a snare on the other side of the subject
 - ▶ Some folks who eat pork, or any other meat, and are not vegetarians; or folks who drive cars, trucks, and other motorized machinery often look down their noses on those who won't do these things.

- ▶ In these cases also, the arrogance, the pride, the “more spiritual than you” attitudes are born from the same source; a sense of thinking that one knows more than the other group. This is the root problem Paul is addressing (“Knowledge puffeth up.”)
- The direct opposite of this which he emphasizes is, “But love builds up.” What does this suggest?
 - ▶ That when we see someone different, it will pay us to examine our attitude about what we see. We want to examine whether the attitude comes from a sense of being more knowledgeable or does it come from a sense of love for a Christian who is trying.
 - ▶ That if we operate from a spirit of love we will always be able to build somebody up.
- This is the first principle: that knowledge can have a way of swelling our heads; that the spiritual opposite to the pride born of imagining that we have knowledge is the spirit of love which gives us power to be benevolent toward those who may not be as far along the road spiritually as we seem to be.

II. Now, let’s go on to the next principle taught in this lesson - **vv. 2 - 3** - And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

- Two things: 1) If we discover that our attitude about someone else’s view about spiritual things comes from us having a sense of possessing superior knowledge, then this verse is a red flag that we don’t know anything at all (as yet) as we ought to know
- Also remember, (and I want us all to get this clearly in our minds) this is not about some erring brother imagining that doing wrong is OK. This message of Paul’s has nothing to do with us approving of a brother who sins and thinks it is OK. It is not about us looking at that kind of thinking and pretending that it is O.K. This teaching here is about how we are to deal with different perspectives on what constitutes obedient and holy behavior.
 - ▶ Difference in those two views? The erring brother is trying to justify sinful behavior, while the sincere brother is trying to live for the Lord by practicing certain things that are done based on how he thinks he can please the Lord.
- 2) Next, we see there that both types of believers have one thing in common. What is that commonality? They that love God are known of God. Meaning, they that love God are owned by the Lord, approved of by the Lord, blessed by the Lord, whether they practice great Christian liberty or constrain themselves because of how they see things.

III. Now we get to the subject at hand and the next 3 principles: **v. 4 - 6** - As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one. 5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and

lords many,) 6 But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

- 1) Idols are nothing at all to be acknowledged - this is the equivalent of us saying today, “Refusing to use what God has put in this world for our use because it has been declared to be taboo is to exalt a taboo as a god that sits higher than Jehovah.”
- 2) We need to start all our actions from the viewpoint that there is only one God and one Jesus Christ and nothing is to be exalted above Him in such a way it causes us to come under some kind of restraint born of honoring that something or giving up our Christian liberty to be subjective to that something.”
 - ▶ Example: Although often laughable, these two superstitious beliefs illustrate this: Turn around if a black cat crosses the road. Don’t walk under a ladder.
- Now, down in **verse 8**, the apostle inserts a doctrinal fact about how we handle these controversial situations and this contains our third principle. I want to put that verse here before we go on - **v. 8** - But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

IV. But there is cause for us to realize something about those who don’t understand our liberty. **v. 7** - Howbeit *there is* not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

- That knowledge - the knowledge that God has made all creatures for our use, and nothing is to be despised. **1Tim. 4:4-5** For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: **5** For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.
 - ▶ The brother described in this verse actually views eating meat offered to an idol as being part of a religious ceremony honoring that idol.
 - ▶ So, what is an equivalent we could talk about today?
 - First, we need to get literal with what is taught. Because here, the apostle is talking specifically about something that a brother would view as idol worship. So, let’s look at this part of the lesson as comments about a situation where we who know the liberty we have in the Lord to use the things of the world get in a situation where a professing brother is watching us, and we have an opportunity to do something that is going to look like we are paying honor to a false god. An example for us might be taking part in a feast at a Buddhist home where there is a family shrine, or taking part in a dinner with a group of Muslims. We know that we could use a situation like that to get some food, or to talk to someone in those religions about Jesus Christ, but how would it look to a brother who doesn’t understand what kind of opportunity we might see in such a situation?
- Why is the lack of that knowledge of liberty a danger? Their conscience, being weak, is defiled.
- I want to pause just a minute here and say that someone who might fit this profile can

also have his conscience defiled by Christians who seem to have more spiritual knowledge, yet they practice some sin in their lives as though it was an acceptable thing to do.

V. Now, on to the main lesson about this brother who may have his conscience defiled if he sees us do something that appears to be part of idol worship, or fellow-shipping with idolaters - **1Cor. 8:9-12** - But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. **10** For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; **11** And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? **12** But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

- Notice what happens - the weak one is emboldened to eat AS THOUGH it is offered to an idol - that is he eats thinking it is OK to do it as a religious act
- The Lord doesn't tolerate the worship of false gods, and believers can be taken out of this world for it.
- Then, the sin we commit by encouraging weak brethren is a sin against Christ - remember that we have Christian liberty to do this kind of thing EXCEPT when it will provoke, or embolden a weak brother to service to a false god.

VI. What should our attitude be? **1Cor. 8:13** Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. A parallel for today - If something that can appear controversial and cause my brother to offend God by being emboldened to do something similar in which he actually, in his mind, collaborates with idolaters, or feels himself to be participating in something that is evil...which he now thinks is acceptable because he saw me do it - I will not do that something as long as the world stands.

VII. Close with admonition: today a lot of professed Christians are taking a position that suggests to their fellow citizens that worshiping in false religions is OK. This really is the equivalent of what the apostle has taught here.